#5
$2.95

CORTO MALTESE

BALLAD OF THE SALT SEA

HUGO PRATT

SUMMARY

The more we get to find out about the mysterious caped and hooded monk, the more mysterious he becomes. He is fairly ruthless, shrewd, commands respect and yet can become as mad as a bat out of hell as he does, to everyone's bewilderment, at the sight of Pandora. When Corto cracks a joke about it, the monk sends him sailing over a cliff! Soon after, a Japanese ship approaches fostering some hope for Cain to escape his captors...

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Translation by Ian Monk
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SEAMAIL

"I'm Aleck, Italian (I was born in Verona, the home-town of Milo Manara), 16 years old, and I'm a big fan of the comic universe. A greeting to ev'ry reader of Hugo Pratt's charming comics! Well, I would like to contact someone who, like me, loves all the comics (especially the italian ones) to swap comics and speak about everything. You put it in the next issue of an Hugo Pratt's comic? Thank you very much, now I'm waiting for answers!

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Italy

Write your comments to: NBM- Corto,
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New York, NY 10016
e-mail: Corto@nbmpub.com
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A STEAMSHIP!
A WARSHIP!
IT'S MARKED ON AN OLD MAP AS "RARO-RARO".
TAKE THE EXACT POSITION.
IT COULD BE A BASE FOR REFUELLING THAT GHOST SHIP THEY'RE LOOKING FOR.
THE BRITISH CORVETTE INFORMED US THAT THERE ARE GERMAN SUBMARINES IN THE AREA. IF YOU LIKE, I COULD GO ASHORE ONTO THAT ISLAND AND HAVE A LOOK.
NOT A BAD IDEA, LIEUTENANT. SEND A SQUAD ASHORE TO HAVE A LOOK AROUND. IN ANY CASE, THEY CAN ALWAYS BRING BACK A FEW CRABS!

A JAPANESE DESTROYER! THEY'VE NEVER BEEN SO FAR SOUTH BEFORE. THEY MUST BE PLANNING TO LAND HERE!
THEY'LL BE LOOKING FOR FRESH FRUIT. WHATEVER HAPPENS, WE'LL HAVE TO CONFRONT THEM.
TELL RASPUTIN TO PREPARE TO FOLLOW THE DEFENCE PLAN!
LOOK! A JAPANESE SHIP. WE MUST ATTRACT THEIR ATTENTION.
I'LL RUN DOWN TO THE BEACH.
YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT THAT FAR, CAIN.
WELL, I'M GOING TO TRY!
THE JAPANESE ARE OUR ALLIES!
HUGO PRATT

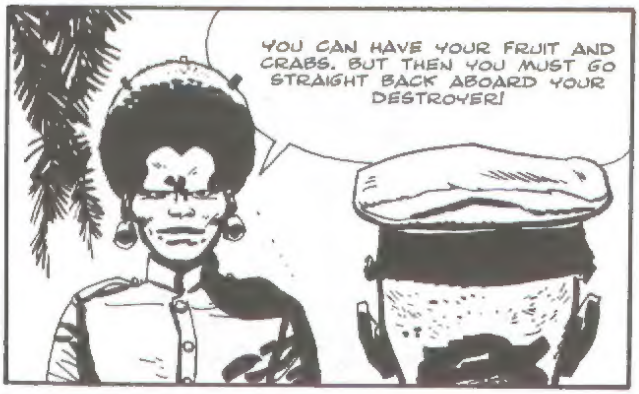
I HAVE TO MAKE IT!
MY GOD, THERE'S NO WAY...
I'M DONE FOR!
STOP THAT, SOLDIER! I WANT HIM ALIVE! BRING HIM TO ME.
HE WANTED TO WARN THE JAPANESE.
YES, I KNOW... BUT YOU WON'T DO THAT ANY MORE, WILL YOU NOW, CAIN?
OH YES I WILL, I'M GOING TO...
SOCK!
OH!

MEANWHILE, THE JAPANESE LAND ON ESCONDIDA.
STRANGE THAT NO ONE'S COME DOWN TO MEET US!

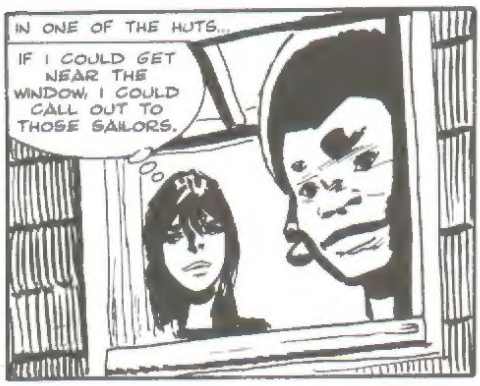
HEY! ANYONE ABOUT?

CAREFUL, SOMEONE'S THERE. KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED. THESE PEOPLE ARE BEHAVING RATHER STRANGELY.

I AM THE VILLAGE CHIEFTAIN. THIS ISLAND IS TABOO. WE ARE INITIATING SOME OF OUR YOUNG INTO OUR MAGIC RITES. WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I'M SORRY, CHIEFTAIN. WE DIDN'T KNOW. WE ONLY WANTED SOME FRUIT AND A FEW CRABS.


YOU CAN HAVE YOUR FRUIT AND CRABS. BUT THEN YOU MUST GO STRAIGHT BACK ABOARD YOUR DESTROYER!

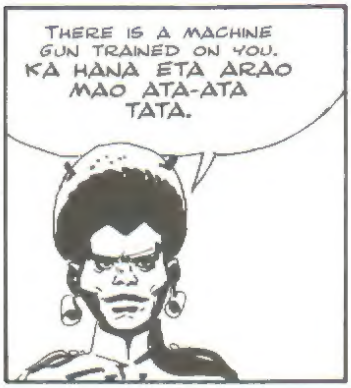
ABOARD OUR "DESTROYER"? IT'S ODD THAT A NATIVE CAN DIFFERENTIATE SO CLEARLY BETWEEN SHIPS... ANYWAY, CRABS AND FRUIT ARE THE ONLY REASON WE ARE HERE.

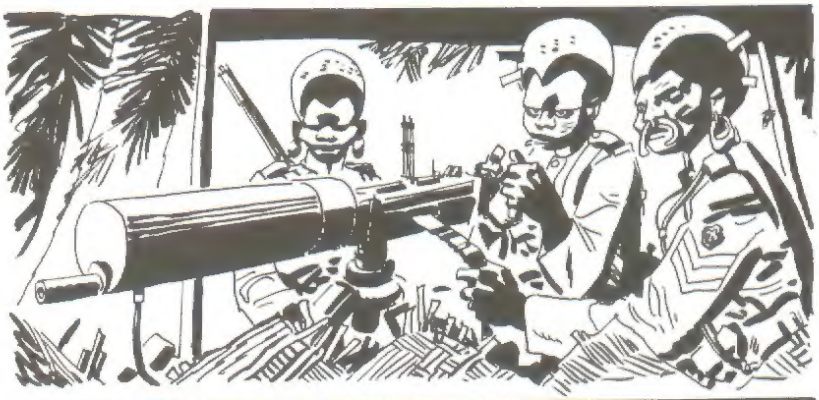

IN ONE OF THE HUTS...
IF I COULD GET NEAR THE WINDOW, I COULD CALL OUT TO THOSE SAILORS.

THE GUARD NEVER LETS ME OUT OF HIS SIGHT. STILL, HE CAN'T STOP ME FROM SHOUTING...

LIEUTENANT! I AM AMERICAN AND I'M BEING KEPT PRISONER HERE!

WHO WAS THAT? WHAT'S GOING ON IN THAT HUT?
ONE MOMENT, LIEUTENANT!


THERE IS A MACHINE GUN TRAINED ON YOU. KA HANA ETA ARAO MAO ATA-ATA TATA.



I AM SORRY. IF THE GIRL HADN'T CALLED OUT, THEN YOU COULD HAVE LEFT AGAIN. NOW, YOU CAN'T.

YOU ARE POWERLESS AGAINST A WARSHIP! DON'T BE FOOLISH, GIVE YOURSELVES UP!
LOOK, LIEU-TENANT...

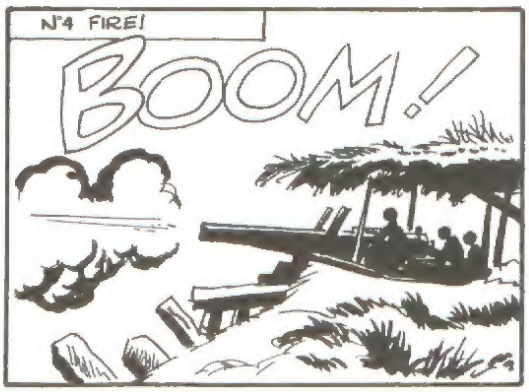
Fiiiii !...

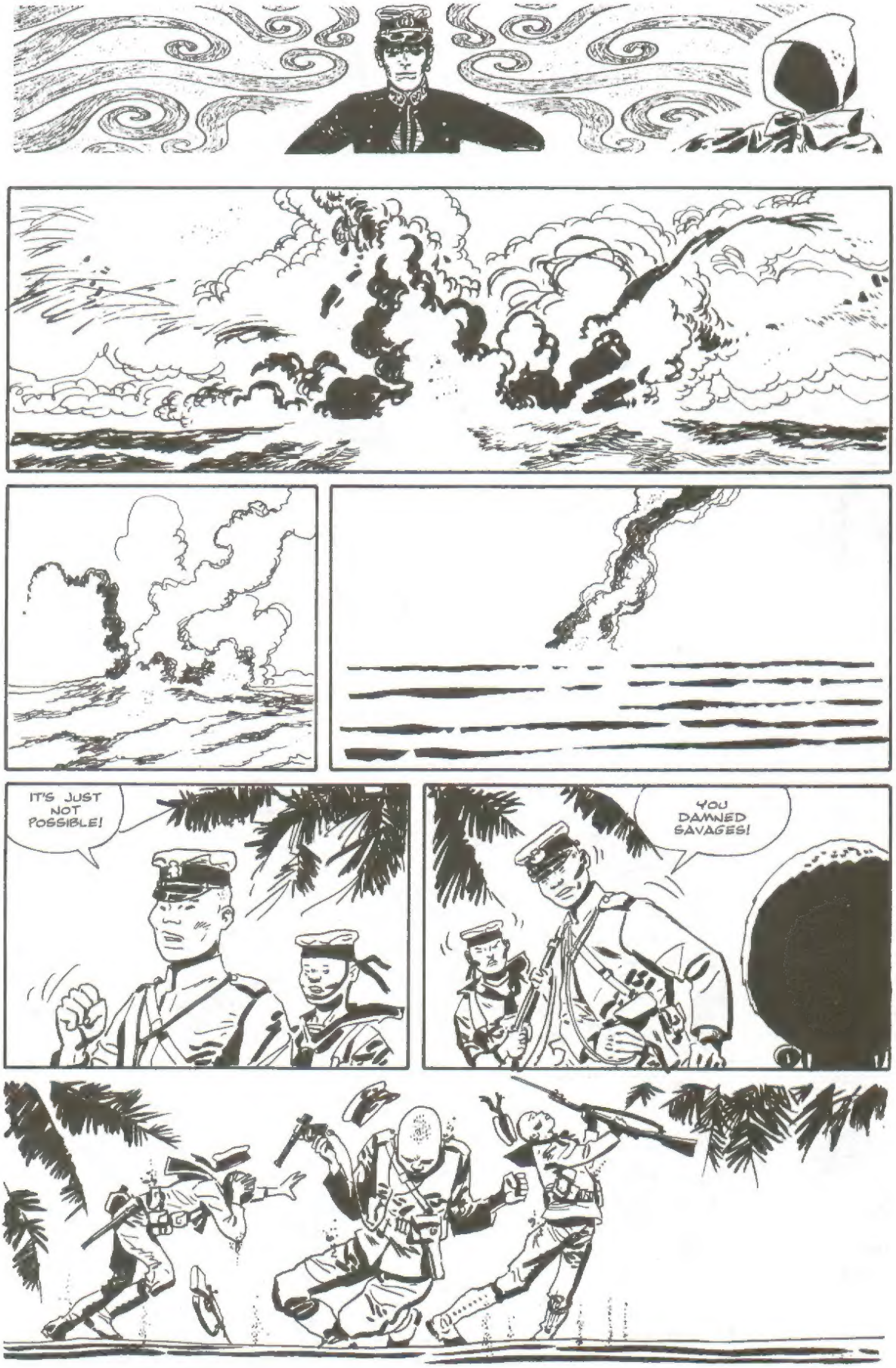
N°1 READY!

N°2 READY!

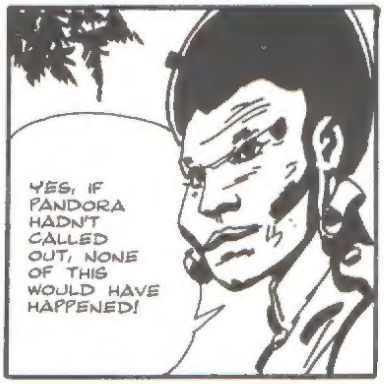
N°3 READY!

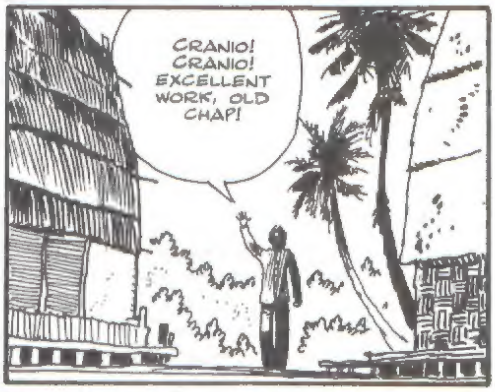
I DON'T UNDER-STAND IT. I CAN'T SEE ANYONE!
THERE, ON THE HILL, SOMETHING'S MOVING!

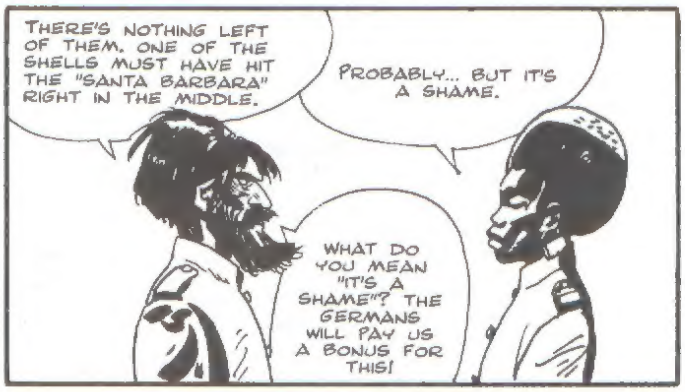

N°4 FIRE!
BOOM!

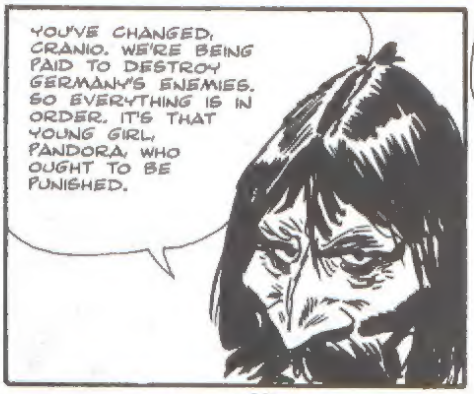

IT'S JUST NOT POSSIBLE!
YOU DAMNED SAVAGES!

THEY'RE DEAD, CRANIO.

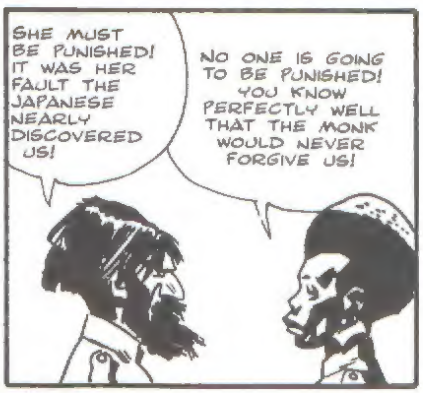

YES, IF PANDORA HADN'T CALLED OUT, NONE OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!


CRANIO! CRANIO! EXCELLENT WORK, OLD CHAP!

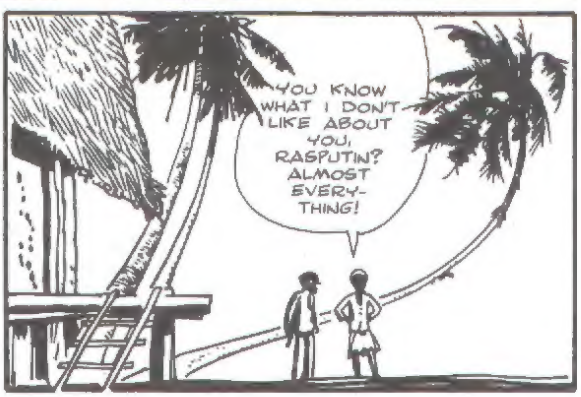

THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OF THEM. ONE OF THE SHELLS MUST HAVE HIT THE "SANTA BARBARA" RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE.
PROBABLY... BUT IT'S A SHAME.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "IT'S A SHAME"? THE GERMANS WILL PAY US A BONUS FOR THIS!


YOU'VE CHANGED, CRANIO. WE'RE BEING PAID TO DESTROY GERMANY'S ENEMIES. SO EVERYTHING IS IN ORDER. IT'S THAT YOUNG GIRL, PANDORA, WHO OUGHT TO BE PUNISHED.

I'LL TAKE HER OFF WITH ME AND GIVE HER A FEW LASHES OF THE WHIP. THAT'LL BUCK HER IDEAS UP A BIT!


SHE MUST BE PUNISHED! IT WAS HER FAULT THE JAPANESE NEARLY DISCOVERED US!
NO ONE IS GOING TO BE PUNISHED! YOU KNOW PERFECTLY WELL THAT THE MONK WOULD NEVER FORGIVE US!

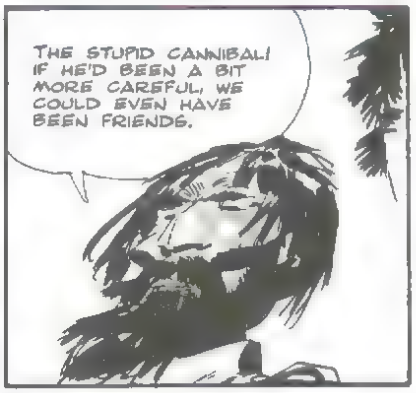
LOOK, CRANIO. THIS IS A "38". IT COULD DO FOR THE MONK AS WELL!

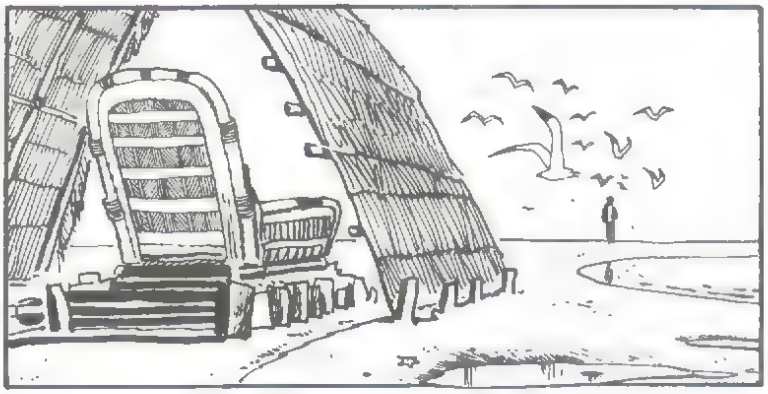

YOU KNOW WHAT I DON'T LIKE ABOUT YOU, RASPUTIN? ALMOST EVERY-THING!

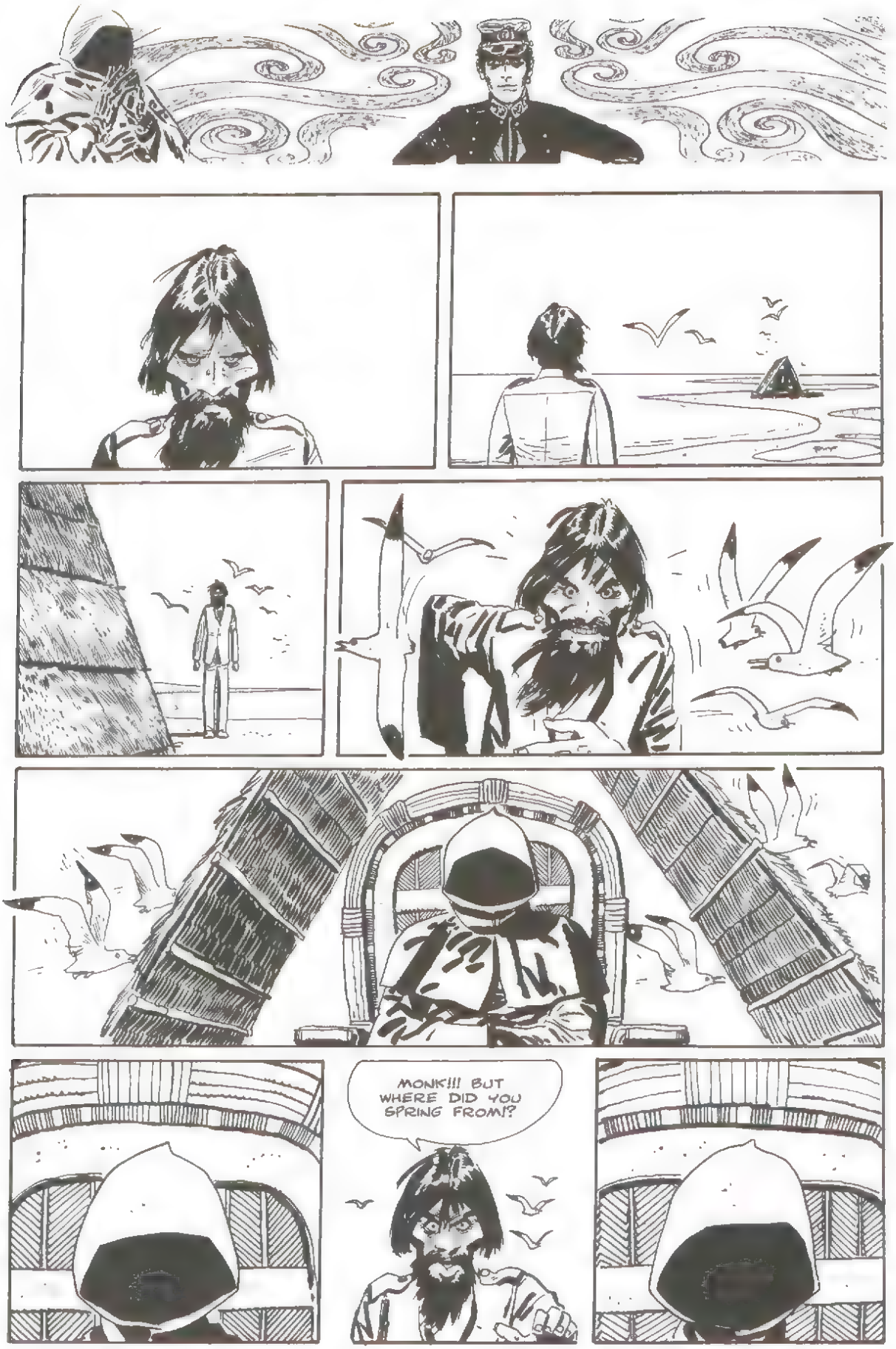
YOU HAVE DUG YOUR OWN GRAVE, CRANIO!

BANG!

I TOLD YOU I WOULD KILL YOU. NOW I HAVE!


THE STUPID CANNIBAL! IF HE'D BEEN A BIT MORE CAREFUL, WE COULD EVEN HAVE BEEN FRIENDS.

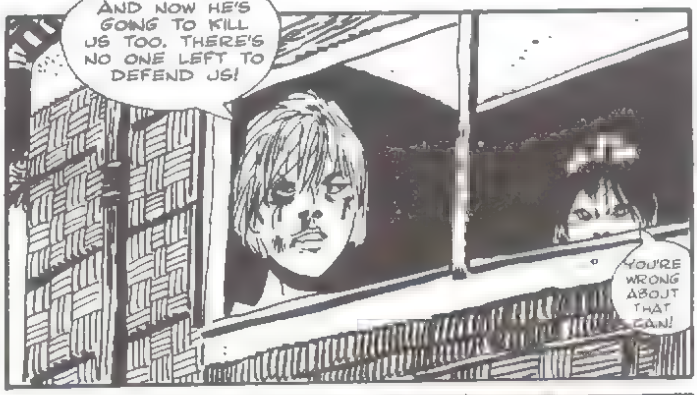



MONK!!! BUT WHERE DID YOU SPRING FROM!?

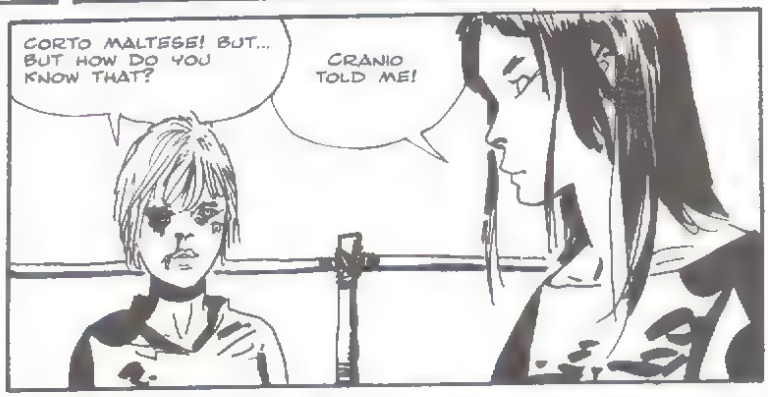
BANG!
BANG!
BANG!
BANG!
BANG!
click!
DAMN YOU, MONK. I'VE KILLED YOU! ANSWER ME! DO SOMETHING!

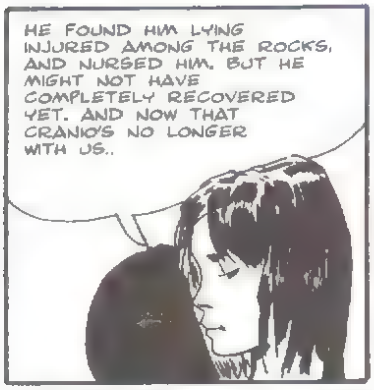
A SCARECROW! ONLY A DAMNED SCARECROW!
IF I DIDN'T KNOW CORTO MALTESE WAS DEAD, THEN I'D SWEAR THIS WAS ONE OF HIS JOKES. BUT THE MONK THREW HIM OFF THE CLIFF... BY THE DEVIL, AM I STARTING TO SEE GHOSTS?
NO, THIS IS A MESSAGE. CORTO MALTESE IS STILL ALIVE!

HERE'S RASPUTIN COMING BACK. YOU KNOW HE'S KILLED CRANIO?
YES, I KNOW. THE FOUL MURDERER!


AND NOW HE'S GOING TO KILL US TOO. THERE'S NO ONE LEFT TO DEFEND US!
YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT THAT CAIN!

CORTO MALTESE ISN'T DEAD. HE'S IN HIDING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND.


CORTO MALTESE! BUT... BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT?
CRANIO TOLD ME!


HE FOUND HIM LYING INJURED AMONG THE ROCKS, AND NURSED HIM. BUT HE MIGHT NOT HAVE COMPLETELY RECOVERED YET. AND NOW THAT CRANIO'S NO LONGER WITH US..

ONE OF US MUST TRY TO HELP HIM. WITH HIM AROUND, THEN WE'D BE SAFE.

CAIN! CAIN! PANDORA! IT'S ME, TARAO! EVERYTHING'S READY!

THERE'S NOBODY ON THE BEACH. IT'S NOW OR NEVER.
YES.

WE SHOULD HURRY!

THE PIROGUE ISN'T VERY LARGE, BUT WE'LL MAKE IT.

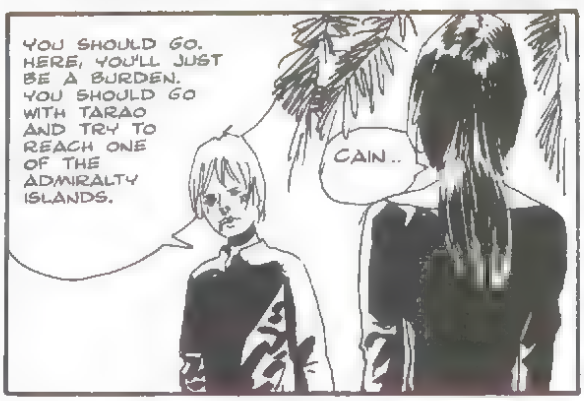
I'VE STOWED SOME PROVISIONS ABOARD WHICH SHOULD BE ENOUGH FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS.

GOOD, LET'S GO THEN. WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
YES, BUT..

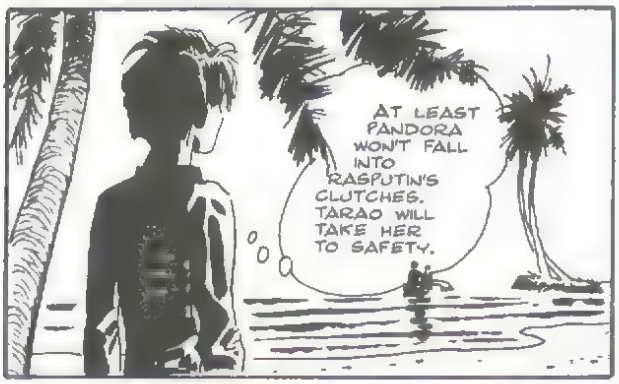
WE CAN'T LEAVE CORTO MALTESE HERE, INJURED AND UNABLE TO DEFEND HIMSELF.

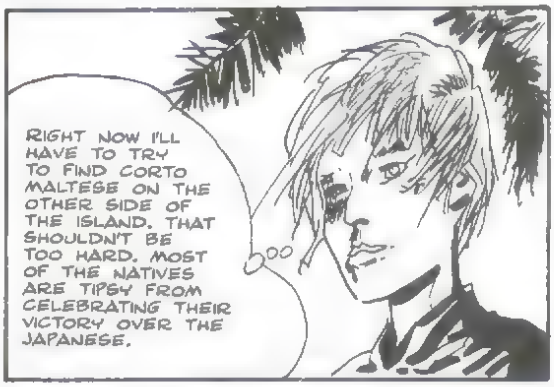
I'M GOING TO STAY WITH HIM! NOW THAT CRANIO'S DEAD AND RASPUTIN'S GONE MAD, CORTO MALTESE NEEDS HELP.

DON'T SAY ANYTHING, PANDORA. MY MIND'S MADE UP!
BUT.. CAIN?

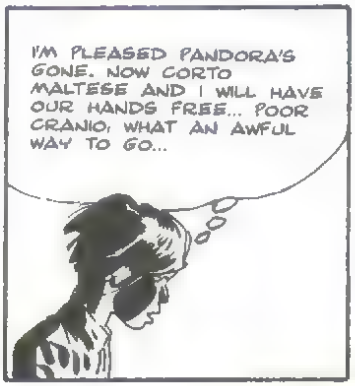

YOU SHOULD GO. HERE, YOU'LL JUST BE A BURDEN. YOU SHOULD GO WITH TARAO AND TRY TO REACH ONE OF THE ADMIRALTY ISLANDS.
CAIN..

IT'S THE BEST THING FOR YOU TO DO. YOU'LL BE IN TOO MUCH DANGER HERE. GO ON, PANDORA!

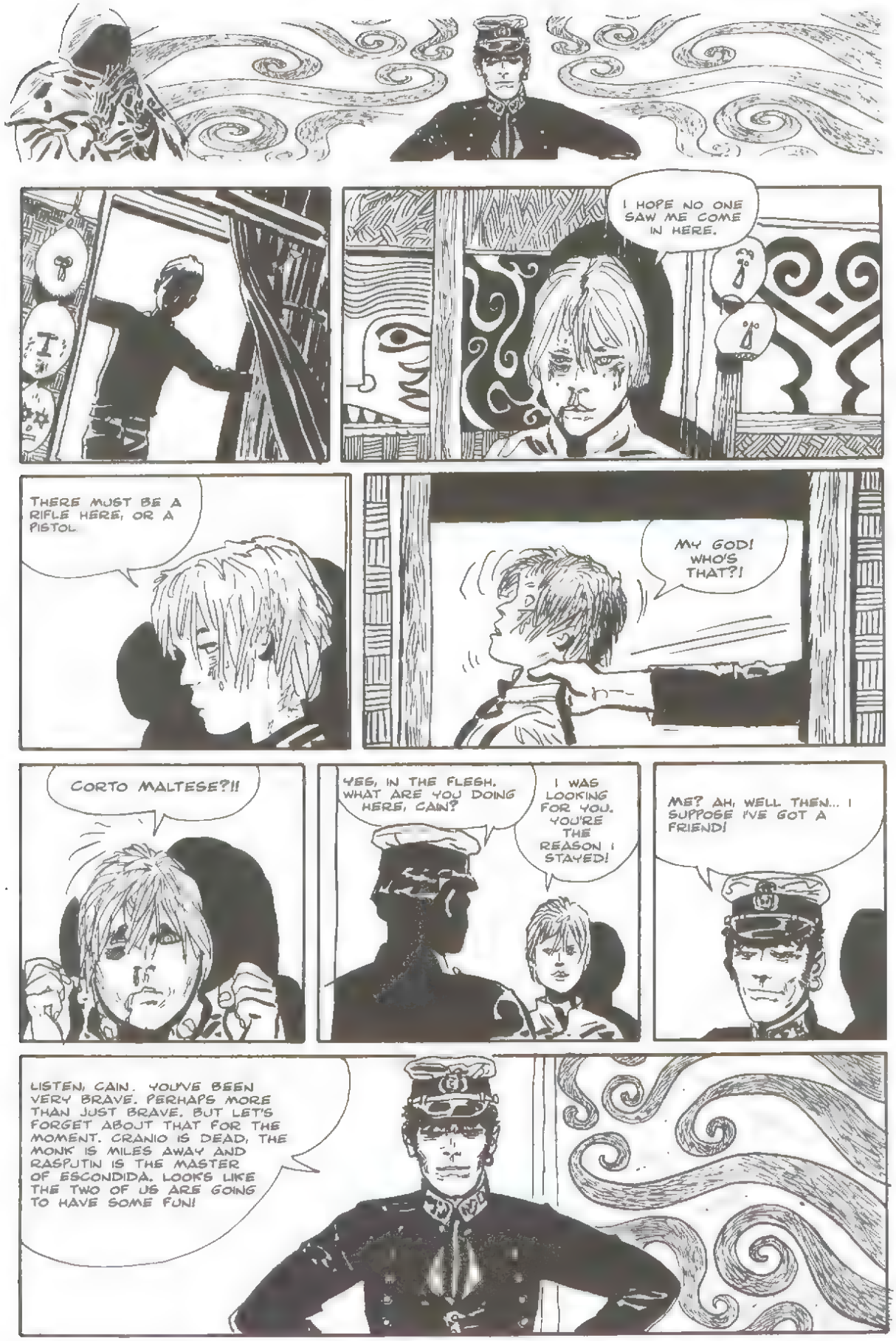

AT LEAST PANDORA WON'T FALL INTO RASPUTIN'S CLUTCHES. TARAO WILL TAKE HER TO SAFETY.

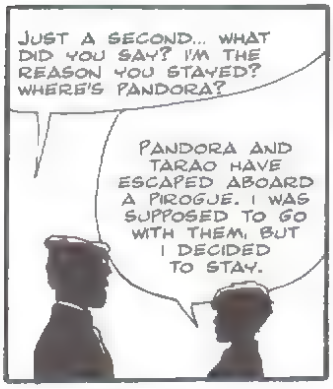

RIGHT NOW I'LL HAVE TO TRY TO FIND CORTO MALTESE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. THAT SHOULDN'T BE TOO HARD. MOST OF THE NATIVES ARE TIPSY FROM CELEBRATING THEIR VICTORY OVER THE JAPANESE.

RASPUTIN MUST BE DRUNK AS WELL.


I'M PLEASED PANDORA'S GONE. NOW CORTO MALTESE AND I WILL HAVE OUR HANDS FREE... POOR CRANIO, WHAT AN AWFUL WAY TO GO...

SO FAR, SO GOOD. THERE'S THE HUT WHERE CRANIO LIVED. PERHAPS THERE WILL BE SOME WEAPONS INSIDE.


I
I HOPE NO ONE SAW ME COME IN HERE.
THERE MUST BE A RIFLE HERE, OR A PISTOL.
MY GOD! WHO'S THAT?!
CORTO MALTESE?!!
YES, IN THE FLESH. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, CAIN?
I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU. YOU'RE THE REASON I STAYED!
ME? AH, WELL THEN... I SUPPOSE I'VE GOT A FRIEND!
LISTEN, CAIN. YOU'VE BEEN VERY BRAVE. PERHAPS MORE THAN JUST BRAVE. BUT LET'S FORGET ABOUT THAT FOR THE MOMENT. CRANIO IS DEAD, THE MONK IS MILES AWAY AND RASPUTIN IS THE MASTER OF ESCONDIDA. LOOKS LIKE THE TWO OF US ARE GOING TO HAVE SOME FUN!

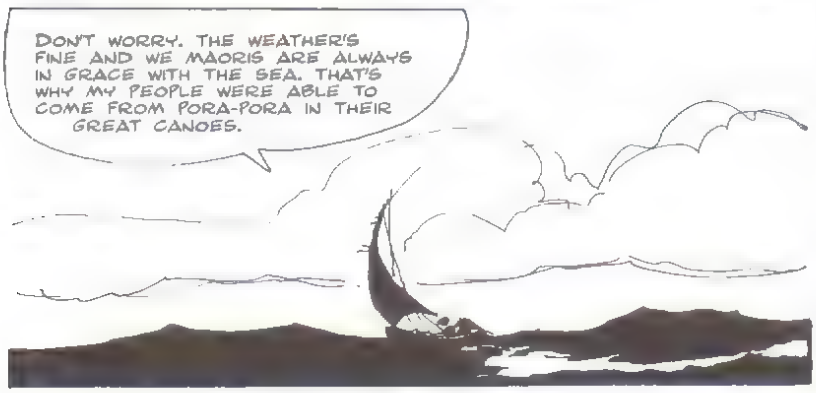

JUST A SECOND... WHAT DID YOU SAY? I'M THE REASON YOU STAYED? WHERE'S PANDORA?
PANDORA AND TARAO HAVE ESCAPED ABOARD A PIROGUE. I WAS SUPPOSED TO GO WITH THEM, BUT I DECIDED TO STAY.

YOU REALLY ARE FOOL-HARDY, CAIN. I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU. BUT I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE. LET'S GO!

FAR AWAY FROM ESCONDIDA.
THE GULLS ARE LEAVING US, PANDORA. THAT MEANS WE'RE NOW A LONG WAY FROM THE ISLAND.

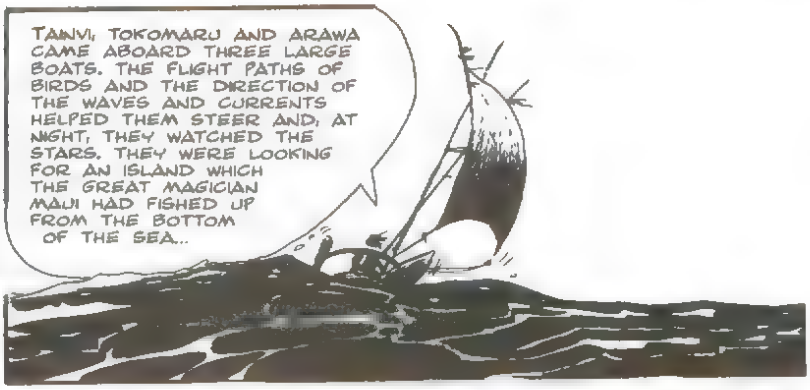
IF THEY HAVEN'T FOLLOWED US SO FAR, IT MEANS THEY WON'T. WE'RE SAFE, PANDORA.

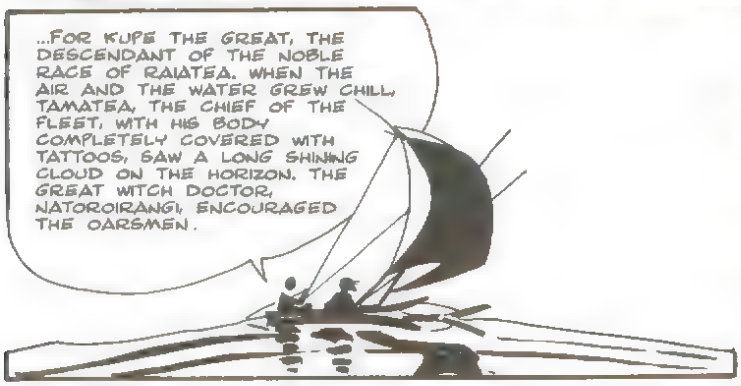
SAFE? ALONE ON THIS COCONUT SHELL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACIFIC?

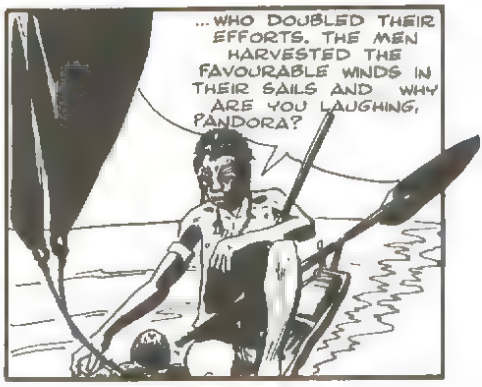

DON'T WORRY. THE WEATHER'S FINE AND WE MAORIS ARE ALWAYS IN GRACE WITH THE SEA. THAT'S WHY MY PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO COME FROM PORA-PORA IN THEIR GREAT CANOES.

PORA-PORA'S NEAR TAHITI, ISN'T IT?

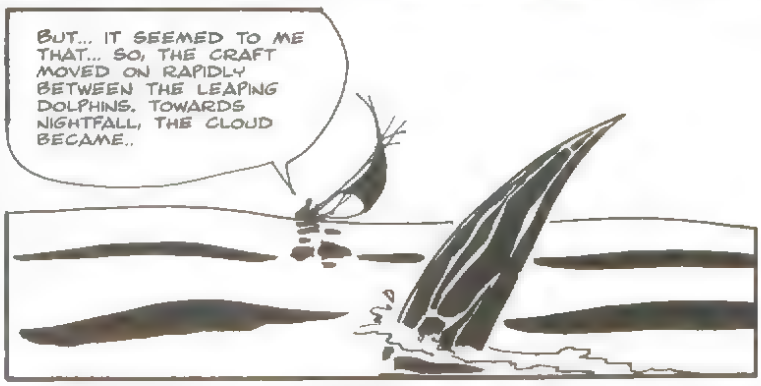
HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO COME SO FAR, TARAO?

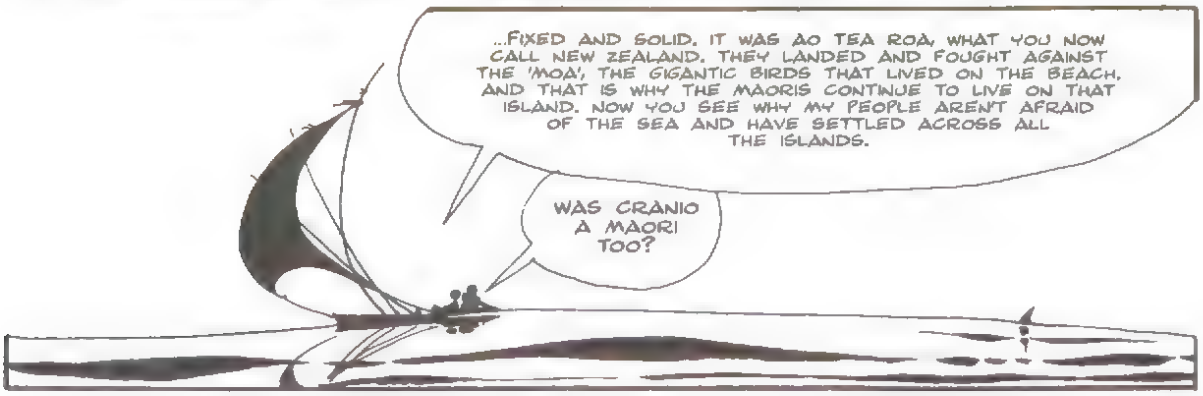

TAWVI, TOKOMARU AND ARAWA CAME ABOARD THREE LARGE BOATS. THE FLIGHT PATHS OF BIRDS AND THE DIRECTION OF THE WAVES AND CURRENTS HELPED THEM STEER AND, AT NIGHT, THEY WATCHED THE STARS. THEY WERE LOOKING FOR AN ISLAND WHICH THE GREAT MAGICIAN MAUI HAD FISHED UP FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA..

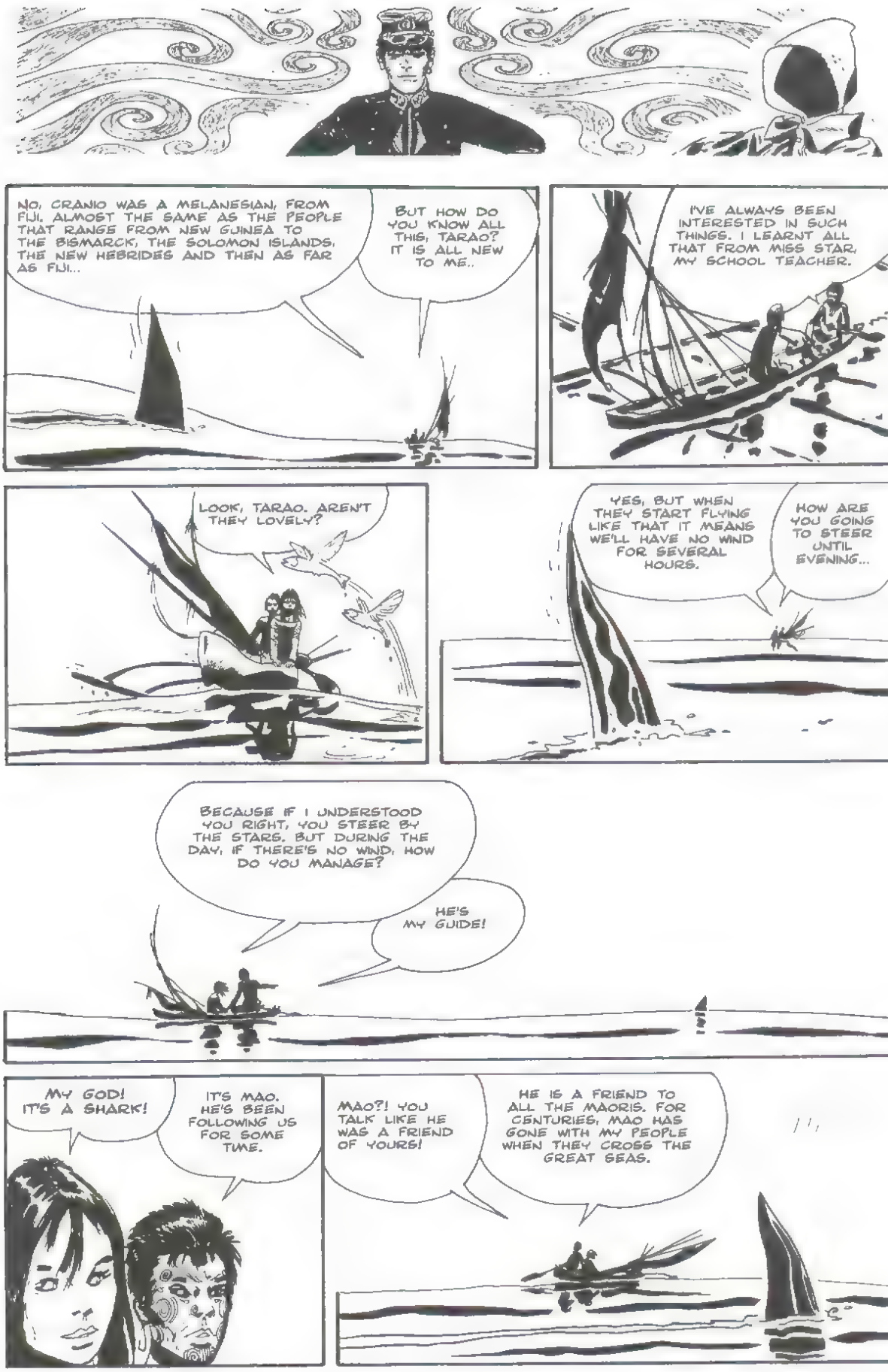

..FOR KUPE THE GREAT, THE DESCENDANT OF THE NOBLE RACE OF RAIATEA. WHEN THE AIR AND THE WATER GREW CHILL, TAMATEA, THE CHIEF OF THE FLEET, WITH HIS BODY COMPLETELY COVERED WITH TATTOOS, SAW A LONG SHINING CLOUD ON THE HORIZON. THE GREAT WITCH DOCTOR, NATOROIRANGI, ENCOURAGED THE OARSMEN.

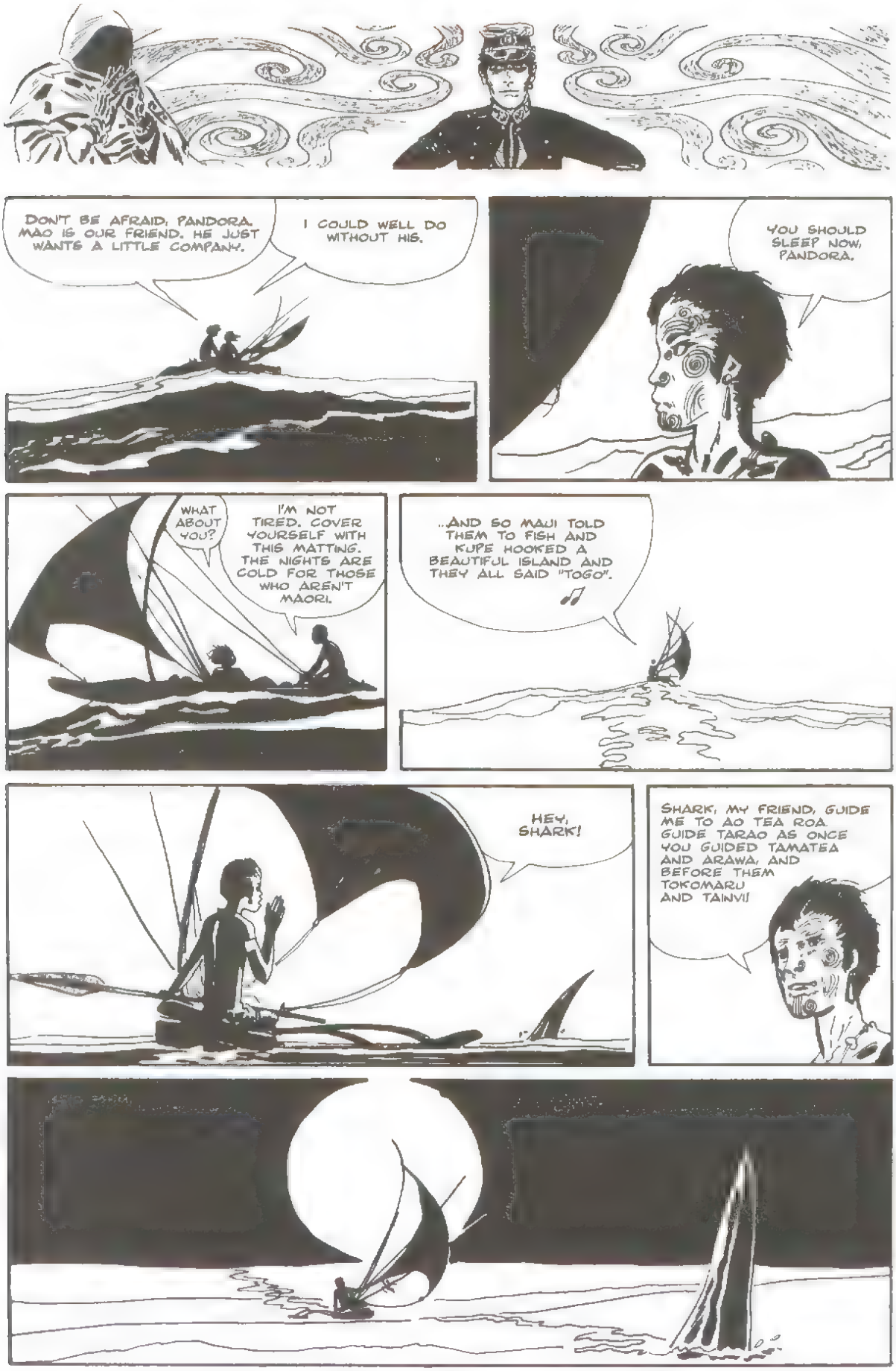

...WHO DOUBLED THEIR EFFORTS. THE MEN HARVESTED THE FAVOURABLE WINDS IN THEIR SAILS AND WHY ARE YOU LAUGHING, PANDORA?

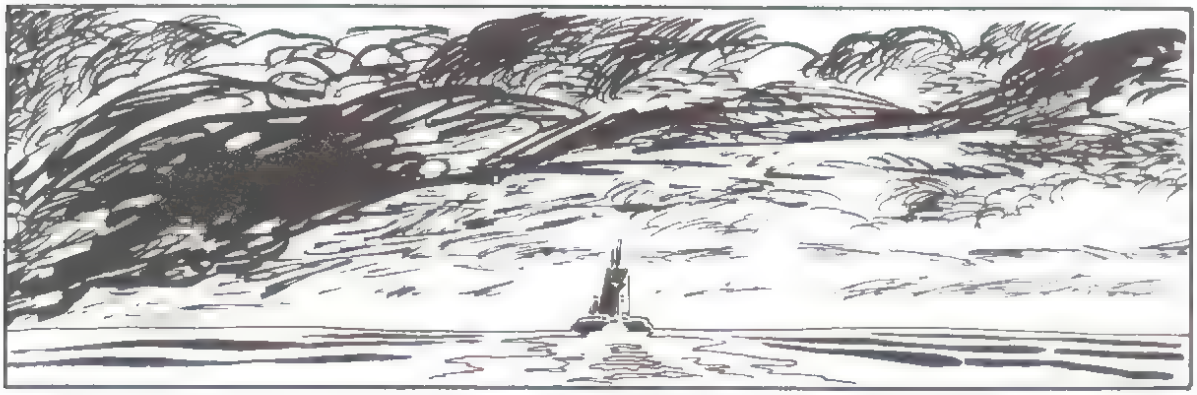
NO, I'M NOT LAUGHING. I THINK YOUR STORY'S FASCINATING... GO ON, TARAO!


BUT... IT SEEMED TO ME THAT... SO, THE CRAFT MOVED ON RAPIDLY BETWEEN THE LEAPING DOLPHINS. TOWARDS NIGHTFALL, THE CLOUD BECAME..


..FIXED AND SOLID. IT WAS AO TEA ROA, WHAT YOU NOW CALL NEW ZEALAND. THEY LANDED AND FOUGHT AGAINST THE 'MOA', THE GIGANTIC BIRDS THAT LIVED ON THE BEACH, AND THAT IS WHY THE MAORIS CONTINUE TO LIVE ON THAT ISLAND. NOW YOU SEE WHY MY PEOPLE AREN'T AFRAID OF THE SEA AND HAVE SETTLED ACROSS ALL THE ISLANDS.
WAS CRANIO A MAORI TOO?


NO, CRANIO WAS A MELANESIAN, FROM FIJI. ALMOST THE SAME AS THE PEOPLE THAT RANGE FROM NEW GUINEA TO THE BISMARCK, THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, THE NEW HEBRIDES AND THEN AS FAR AS FIJI...
BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW ALL THIS, TARAO? IT IS ALL NEW TO ME..
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN SUCH THINGS. I LEARNT ALL THAT FROM MISS STAR, MY SCHOOL TEACHER.
LOOK, TARAO. AREN'T THEY LOVELY?
YES, BUT WHEN THEY START FLYING LIKE THAT IT MEANS WE'LL HAVE NO WIND FOR SEVERAL HOURS.
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO STEER UNTIL EVENING...
BECAUSE IF I UNDERSTOOD YOU RIGHT, YOU STEER BY THE STARS. BUT DURING THE DAY, IF THERE'S NO WIND, HOW DO YOU MANAGE?
HE'S MY GUIDE!
MY GOD! IT'S A SHARK!
IT'S MAO. HE'S BEEN FOLLOWING US FOR SOME TIME.
MAO?! YOU TALK LIKE HE WAS A FRIEND OF YOURS!
HE IS A FRIEND TO ALL THE MAORIS. FOR CENTURIES, MAO HAS GONE WITH MY PEOPLE WHEN THEY CROSS THE GREAT SEAS.


DON'T BE AFRAID, PANDORA. MAO IS OUR FRIEND. HE JUST WANTS A LITTLE COMPANY.
I COULD WELL DO WITHOUT HIS.
YOU SHOULD SLEEP NOW, PANDORA.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I'M NOT TIRED. COVER YOURSELF WITH THIS MATTING. THE NIGHTS ARE COLD FOR THOSE WHO AREN'T MAORI.
..AND SO MAUI TOLD THEM TO FISH AND KUPE HOOKED A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND AND THEY ALL SAID "TOGO".
HEY, SHARK!
SHARK, MY FRIEND, GUIDE ME TO AO TEA ROA. GUIDE TARAO AS ONCE YOU GUIDED TAMATEA AND ARAWA, AND BEFORE THEM TOKOMARU AND TAINUI!



ON THE TURRET IS OUR OLD FRIEND, MR SLÜTTER..

MR SLÜTTER, THE MONK WANTS TO SEE YOU.
OKAY, TAKE MY PLACE.

YOU CALLED FOR ME. WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I CAN'T MAKE CONTACT WITH...

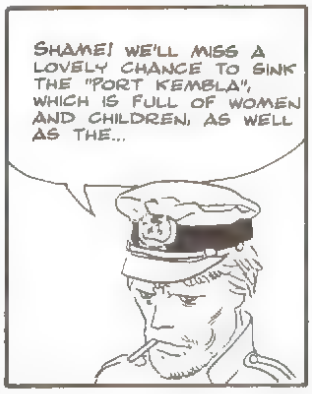
..OUR ISLAND. SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED. I HAVEN'T SPOKEN TO CRANIO FOR THREE DAYS.

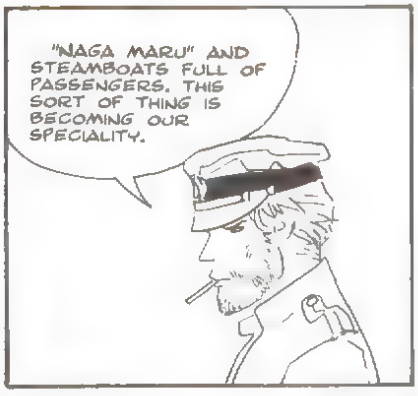
SINCE THEN, WE'VE LOST ALL CONTACT. WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

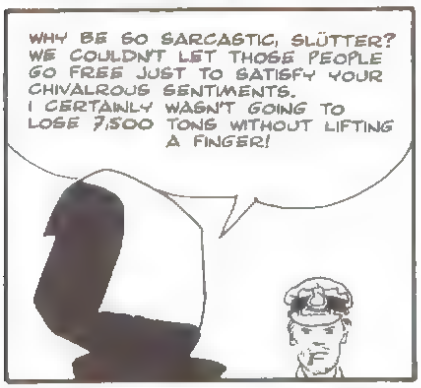
MY OPINION IS THAT ESCONDIDA DOESN'T WANT TO CONTACT US!

DON'T BE STUPID, SLÜTTER. I AM THE MONK! THE KING OF ESCONDIDA!
YOU ASKED MY OPINION AND I GAVE IT TO YOU. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO NOW?

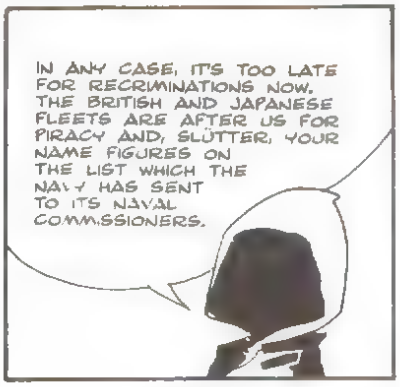
WE'RE GOING TO TURN BACK TO ESCONDIDA.

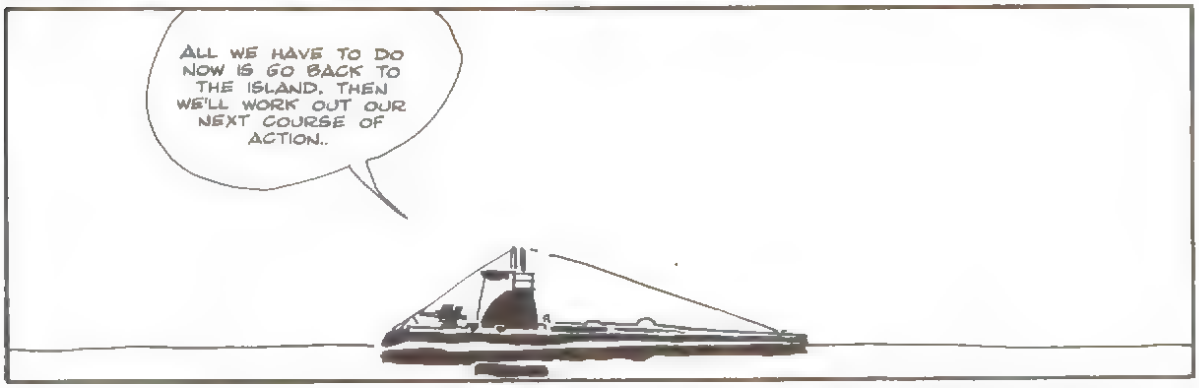

SHAME! WE'LL MISS A LOVELY CHANCE TO SINK THE "PORT KEMBLA", WHICH IS FULL OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN, AS WELL AS THE...

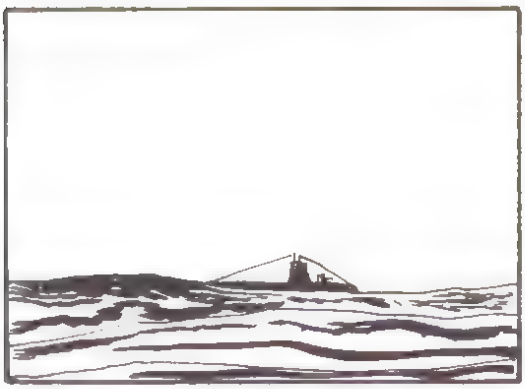

"NAGA MARU" AND STEAMBOATS FULL OF PASSENGERS. THIS SORT OF THING IS BECOMING OUR SPECIALITY.

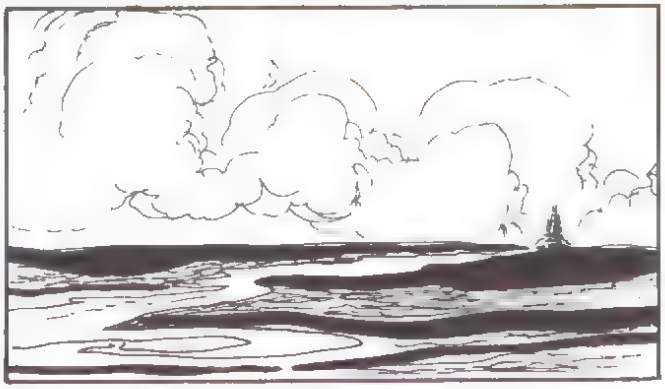

WHY BE SO SARCASTIC, SLÜTTER? WE COULDN'T LET THOSE PEOPLE GO FREE JUST TO SATISFY YOUR CHIVALROUS SENTIMENTS. I CERTAINLY WASN'T GOING TO LOSE 7,500 TONS WITHOUT LIFTING A FINGER!

MY DEAR SHIP'S LIEUTENANT, MY BUSINESS HERE IS NOT TO GIVE YOU EXPLANATIONS YOU ARE TO FOLLOW MY ORDERS TO THE LETTER!

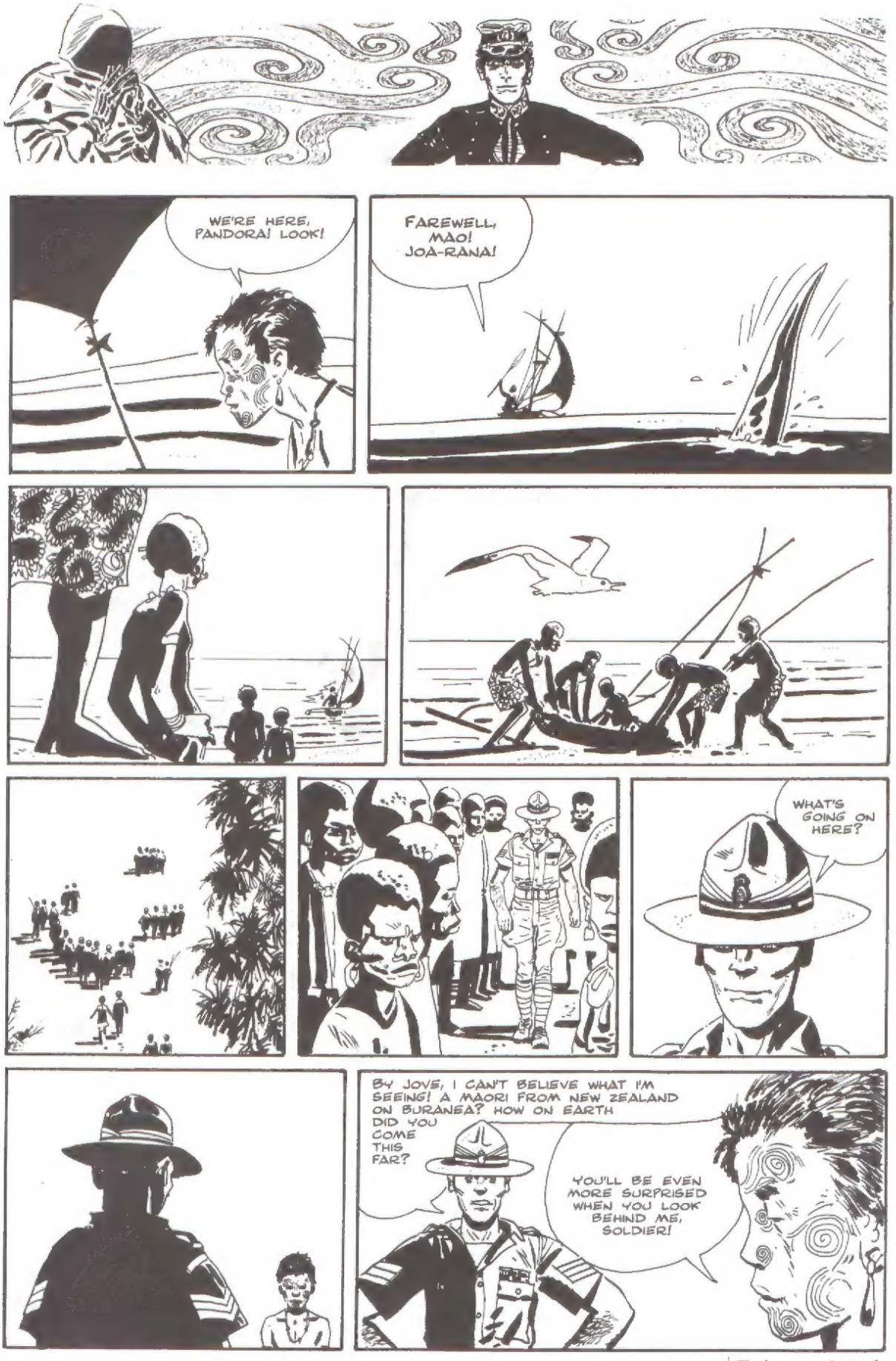

IN ANY CASE, IT'S TOO LATE FOR RECRIMINATIONS NOW. THE BRITISH AND JAPANESE FLEETS ARE AFTER US FOR PIRACY AND, SLÜTTER, YOUR NAME FIGURES ON THE LIST WHICH THE NAVY HAS SENT TO ITS NAVAL COMMISSIONERS.


ALL WE HAVE TO DO NOW IS GO BACK TO THE ISLAND. THEN WE'LL WORK OUT OUR NEXT COURSE OF ACTION..





MEANWHILE, FARTHER AWAY TO THE SOUTH-WEST...
I DON'T FEEL WELL, TARAO!
PANDORA WON'T LAST MUCH LONGER LIKE THIS. I HAVE TO FIND AN ISLAND!
♫ HATA-HATA-EUA, HATA-HATA RU, RHATA-HATA-EUA, RHATA-HATA HU! SHARK! I'M LOOKING FOR AN ISLAND! ♫
AN ISLAND THAT CAN'T BE FAR FROM HERE... AN ISLAND...
AN ISLAND CALLED...
BURA-NEA!!!


WE'RE HERE, PANDORA! LOOK!
FAREWELL, MAO! JOA-RANA!
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
BY JOVE, I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT I'M SEEING! A MAORI FROM NEW ZEALAND ON BURANEA? HOW ON EARTH DID YOU COME THIS FAR?
YOU'LL BE EVEN MORE SURPRISED WHEN YOU LOOK BEHIND ME, SOLDIER!

To be continued

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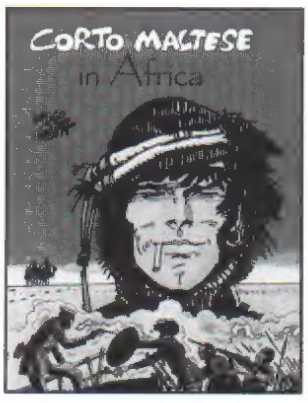

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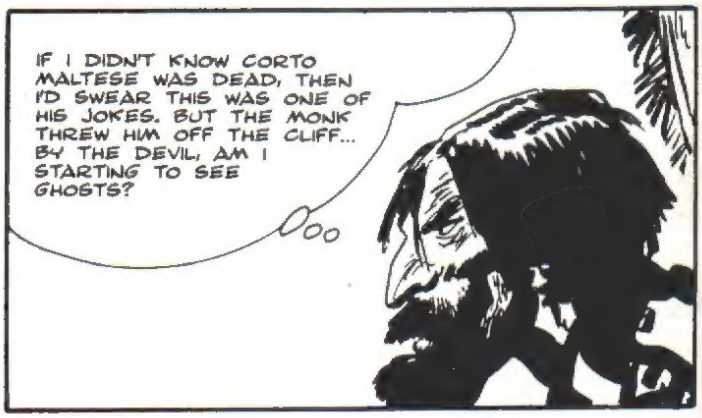
A SCARECROW! ONLY A DAMNED SCARECROW!


IF I DIDN'T KNOW CORTO MALTESE WAS DEAD, THEN I'D SWEAR THIS WAS ONE OF HIS JOKES. BUT THE MONK THREW HIM OFF THE CLIFF... BY THE DEVIL, AM I STARTING TO SEE GHOSTS?

NO, THIS IS A MESSAGE. CORTO MALTESE IS STILL ALIVE!